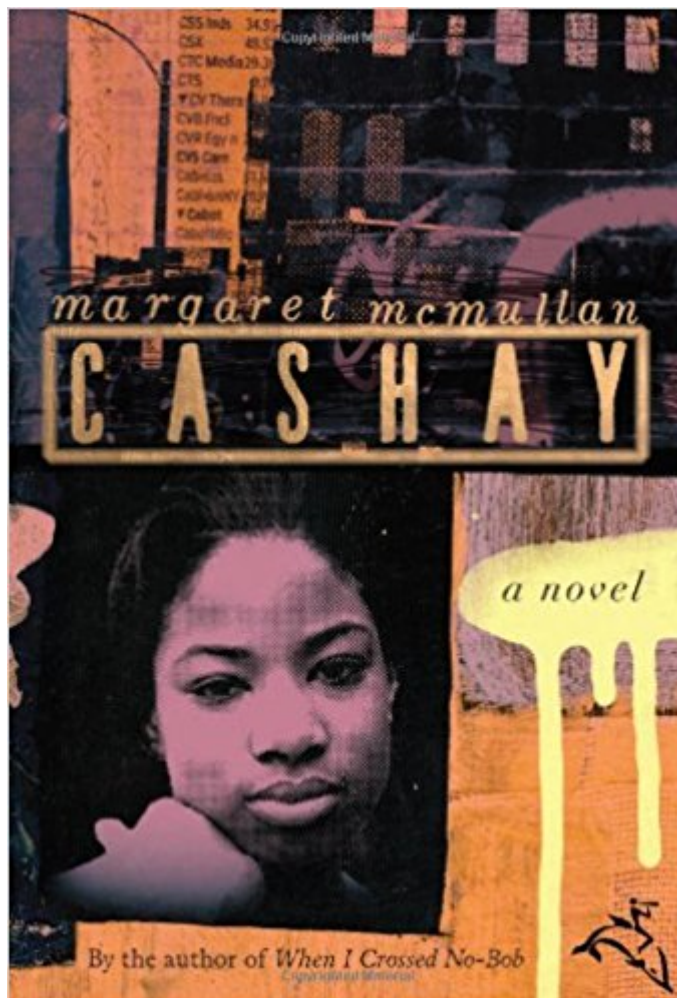


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# Cashay



## Synopsis

In her fourteen years living in a Chicago housing project, Cashay has never ridden in a taxi cab, seen the city lit up at night, or set foot in a museum. She's not pretty, or graceful, or bubbly like her little sister, Sashay. She gets her family by on a couple of dollars and food stamps every week. No, Cashay has never felt much like a treasure. "Your name doesn't signify who you are," Cashay tells her sister. But that was before Sashay was killed. Before her mother started using again. Before her mentor, Allison, showed Cashay a bigger piece of the world, and encouraged her to finally, finally step into it. A name may not signify who you are, but in this poignant coming of age story by acclaimed writer Margaret McMullan, readers will find that indeed, Cashay is an exception to her own rule.

## Book Information

Lexile Measure: 700L (What's this?)

Hardcover: 176 pages

Publisher: HMH Books for Young Readers; 1 edition (April 6, 2009)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0547076568

ISBN-13: 978-0547076560

Product Dimensions: 7.8 x 5.4 x 0.9 inches

Shipping Weight: 10.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 2.9 out of 5 stars 6 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #790,052 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #79 in [Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Social & Family Issues > Homelessness & Poverty](#) #107 in [Books > Children's Books > Growing Up & Facts of Life > Difficult Discussions > Drugs](#) #243 in [Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Social & Family Issues > Drugs & Alcohol Abuse](#)

Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

## Customer Reviews

Grade 7-10 • When 13-year-old Cashay's beloved younger sister is accidentally killed in a drug-related shooting and their mother relapses into drug addiction, this African-American resident of Chicago's notorious Cabrini Green housing projects seethes with resentment and anger. Enter Allison, a white stockbroker who agrees to mentor the teenager. Their relationship benefits both participants, as Cashay slowly begins to heal, and Allison learns to open up her heart to others.

This short, accessible novel is predictable, with a curious lack of tension during scenes that should be very scary, but also with moments of humor ("We're reading stupid books—books about white people who lose pets") and of touching pathos ("He was born just so he could cry"). It is peopled with stock characters, oversimplifies the world, and puts its protagonist through all the stages of grief in a mere 166 pages. However, there is no mistaking the ring of authenticity in Cashay's voice and in the details of life in modern-day Cabrini Green (or what's left of it). Rhona Campbell, Washington, DC Public Library Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Margaret McMullan is also the author of the adult novels *In My Mother's House* and *When Warhol Was Still Alive*. Her work has appeared in such publications as *Glamour*, the *Chicago Tribune*, and *Michigan Quarterly Review*. She is a professor and the chair of the English department at the University of Evansville in Indiana.

We live in Chicago, near Cabrini-Green, at least geographically. It is an area where there is great disparity in wealth. It is technically integrated, but blacks and whites do not interact very often. My daughter brought home this book from school and soon was engrossed in the story of the world near us, yet so far away. Ms. McMullan tells a riveting tale, that is ultimately uplifting, without glossing over the realities of life (and death) at Cabrini. This is a story of hope, but it is much more than that. I believe it is very effective at challenging the young adult reader to examine what their responsibilities are in our society. What are the obligations of the individual to help themselves and their fellow citizens? What can one individual do in face of institutionalized poverty and racism? Margaret McMullan challenges the reader without preaching, and lets these types of important questions naturally bubble up. I like a book that makes the reader ask the big questions, and it provoked some great conversations in our family. This is a very good read for the young adult reader and it made this adult ask himself some very tough questions.

Mississippi-born Margaret McMullan has once again made me feel younger by presenting the world through a child's eyes--and a little wiser (ditto)--this time after reading her newest novel, "Cashay" (Houghton Mifflin, 2009). Like her previous two highly-praised Houghton Mifflin books marketed to young adults, "How I Found The Strong" (2004) and "When I Crossed No-Bob" (2007), "Cashay" is a witty, heartbreaking book well worth reading--for the young, the middle-aged and the old. "How I Found The Strong" was named Indiana Best Young Adult Book of Fiction in 2004, earned the

Mississippi Institute of Arts & Letters Award for Fiction in 2005, and was a Booklist Top Ten First Novel for Youth. "When I Crossed No-Bob" was named both a 2007 School Library Journal Best Book of the Year and the Mississippi Institute of Arts & Letters Award for Fiction in 2008. I expect Cashay to surpass these accomplishments. This will likely be Margaret's big, breakout book. Like the previous two books, her new protagonist, the book's namesake, which translates to "treasure," is a child trapped in the toughest of times--her cherished, younger sister dies beside her on concrete by an errant bullet; her mother recklessly copes with dope to the point of parental uselessness. "We walk the same speed," Cashay tells us with great pride and hope in the book's opening sentence as she and her sister Sashay traverse the inner-city sidewalks and intersections leading to school. "Sashay looks like me, except she's pretty. She's smaller than I am and smilier. She moves like her name--all smooth and wiggly at once," Margaret writes. But the bullet too soon comes, and Cashay becomes too soon alone. This time, instead of putting us in 19th Century Mississippi, Margaret plops us right smack dab in the projects of 21st Century Chicago, a city Margaret evidently has strong connections to, as well. Margaret's deep southern heart also pounds out a mighty Chicago beat. Her prose and love of modern-day Chicago is as convincing, moving and meaningful as her paragraphs about Civil War-era Mississippi, each carefully constructed sentence--she has the gift for beautiful, tight writing, the type that seems so simple in structure but so hard to imitate--in "Cashay" is as dependable as the steadiest of heartbeats. "We step in through the right ventricle," Margaret writes near midpoint when Cashay accepts the Museum of Science and Industry's dare to walk through the pulsating heart of a twenty-eight-story-tall human. "It's crowded inside this heart. It smells of sweat, plastic, people's shoes, and morning breath. The artery lights blink on and off. A lady tells her daughter that some people get married here. Somebody's used Big Gulp cup is right there on the left ventricle." Even better, we, the reader, tour a brave, bruised heart of a witty, wise-beyond-her-years 14-year-old as she ultimately faces her sister's killer and triumphs over tragedy with help from her temporary guardian and new friend, Allison, a grownup Chicago stockbroker. The young adult genre targeted by this book is a slight misnomer (not that there's anything wrong with young adult books other than they can scare off old adult readers). I'm 44, and though it's my daughter's book, I enjoyed the hell out of it. Anyone 14 and older will likely tell you the same thing, just as they do about Margaret's other two "young adult" books. This is not a book review; it's a book recommendation from a person who reads a lot of "grownup" books, many not nearly as worthwhile as this one. I read Cashay's 163 smallish pages on a quiet Sunday morning with coffee. I couldn't put the book down, except to pour more coffee. I learned a lot from Cashay--even simplified lessons about the stock market and its role in the low-cal economy we

currently struggle with. I learned about perseverance and the value of finding the "treasure" in your own self, lessons I hope my own daughter takes to heart. Equally as important, though no real surprise, I relearned that each new Margaret McMullan book--she also has two published adult-geared fiction books--is her best one yet. That, for a reader, is what's treasured most. I'm certain there are more Margaret McMullan books to come that will also find a place in the heart of my bookshelf.

I have to agree that this is a travesty of a book. As a librarian in a busy urban branch, I'm always on the lookout for titles that will appeal to African American teens. I was struck by the inauthentic voice, and the rampant stereotypes. It's a harsh book with a cast of ghetto familiars: the corner drug dealer, the addicted mother, the slow child (a victim of mom's drug use), the drive-by shooter...and all of the whites who come to the rescue. Imbalanced, to say the least. I'm not against writers creating characters of a different race, but this book seems to say "this is what it's like to be black in the inner city." Note the absence of an author photo on the dustjacket. Just as I would question a man writing about the experience of carrying a child and giving birth, I wonder how a white woman can portray an honest experience (in the first person) of a young black teen in a horrifying situation of drugs and violence.

Cashay is a lovely book about a confused but ultimately brave girl struggling to find her way after her sister is killed. It is an emotionally honest and well-told story with a satisfying conclusion. Yes the girl does have mentors who are white, but her aunt Jo'Neisha is a strong role model, too. Those who are criticizing the book so intently are the ones who have issues. In Cashay, McMullan creates a likable and, to my mind, believable young woman who overcomes her troubled environment without rejecting her heritage.

I agree with the reviewers who found this to be racist and inauthentic. A few moments shine--Allison and Cashay's relationship at least feels like it isn't based totally on stereotype--but overall extremely shallow.

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Cashay

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